

The CERT Fire Safety Role

As a CERT member, following a disaster, you may be able to suppress small fires. When carrying out this role, your personal safety must be your primary concern.

There are eight basic rules for safe fire suppression. Following these guidelines will enable you to protect your own safety.

Rule 1: Use Safety Equipment

To protect your personal safety, it is important to use safety equipment at all times. Safety equipment includes:

- Gloves.
- Goggles.
- Dust mask.
- Helmet.
- Boots.

In a disaster, CERTs wear personal safety equipment.

Rule 2: Don't Try To Fight a Fire Alone

In a disaster, there is safety in numbers, so be sure that you have help.

- **Work with a buddy.** Buddies serve an important purpose: They cover your back, look around for danger, and protect your safety.
- **Have a backup team whenever possible.** A backup team covering you and your buddy just makes good sense. They can support your fire suppression efforts and can provide help if you need it.

Your first priority is your personal safety. Don't put yourself at risk.

Rule 3: Check Before Entering

When entering an area:

- Feel closed doors with the back of the hand, working from the bottom of the door up. Do **not** touch the door handle before feeling the door.
- If the door is hot, there is fire behind it. **Do not enter!** Opening the door will feed additional oxygen to the fire. Trapped fuel vapors can ignite violently.

Do not enter smoke-filled areas. Fire suppression in smoke-filled areas requires breathing and protective equipment that CERTs don't have.

Rule 4: Plan Your Exit

Fires spread much faster than you might think.

- **Always have two ways to exit the fire area.** A backup escape plan is necessary in case your main escape route becomes blocked.
- **Confine the fire**, whenever possible, as you leave the area by shutting doors as you leave.

Rule 5: Maintain a Safe Distance and Position

- **Don't get too close.** If you attempt to put out a small fire, know the effective range of your fire extinguisher. Stay near the outer boundary of that range. If you feel the heat before discharging the extinguisher, you are too close. Move up on the fire as it gets smaller to the point of extinguishment.
- **Stay low to the ground.** Smoke will naturally rise. Keeping low to the ground will provide you with fresher air to breathe. Remember, if smoke is building in a room, leave the area and confine the fire, if possible.

Rule 6: Suppress Only Small Fires

For planning purposes, a small fire is about the size of a wastepaper can and can be extinguished with one fire extinguisher.

Learn the capability of your equipment. Do not try to suppress a fire that is too large for the equipment.

Rule 7: Use the Correct Equipment in the Correct Manner

Know the proper procedure for operating a portable fire extinguisher.

Rule 8: Overhaul the Fire

Overhauling is the process of locating any potential sources of reignition, such as hidden burning material, and extinguishing them. Always overhaul fires to make sure that the fire's really out before you move on!

Using the Proper Equipment

In equipping yourself to extinguish a fire, it is important to select an extinguisher that:

- Is rated for the class of the fire to be extinguished.
 - Has the capacity for the size of the fire to be extinguished.
 - Is of a size and weight that you can effectively hold and operate.
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Extinguisher Ratings

As you know, portable fire extinguishers are rated according to their effectiveness on various classes of fire:

- Class A—Ordinary Combustibles
 - Class B—Flammable and Combustible Liquids
 - Class C—Electrical Equipment
 - Class D—Combustible Metals
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More on Extinguisher Ratings

Extinguishers are also rated for the size of fire that they can handle. On labels for Class A and B extinguishers, the rating is expressed as a number. The larger the number, the larger the fire on which the extinguisher may be used.

The ratings vary among classes, as shown below.

Capacity Rating

- Class A
 - Expressed in gallons, from 1 to 40
 - 1 = 1½ gallons, 2 = 2½ gallons, 3 = 3¾ gallons, etc.
 - Class B
 - Expressed in square feet of coverage, from 1 to 640
 - Class C
 - No numerical rating
 - Class D
 - No numerical rating: includes a list of the metals for which the extinguishing agent is effective
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Operating a Portable Fire Extinguisher

The procedure for operating a portable fire extinguisher is fairly simple.

- First, **pull** the safety pin located in the handle (twist to break the seal).
- Next, test the extinguisher to ensure that it works, and **aim** the hose or nozzle at the base of the fire.
- Third, **squeeze** the trigger.
- Finally, **sweep** the base of the fire from side to side. Be sure to hold the extinguisher in an upright position as you sweep.

That's all there is to it—pull, aim, squeeze, and sweep (P.A.S.S.).

Lesson Summary

To protect your safety when suppressing fires:

- Wear protective equipment.
 - Work with a buddy and as a team.
 - Plan for safe entry and exit.
 - Maintain a safe distance and position.
 - Suppress only small fires using the proper equipment.
 - Use the P.A.S.S. procedure to operate extinguishers.
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